

1625

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THE
PRINCIPLES
OF
LIBERTY:

OR,
The Right of MANKIND to judge for
themselves in Matters of FAITH,
without positive and compulsive
Determinations.

ALSO
Recommending the actual Use or Exercise
of such RIGHT, as the only Means of
producing *real* RELIGION, and *substan-*
tial VIRTUE in the World.

By ROBERT SEAGRAVE, A. M.

Nullius additus jurare in verba magistri. HOR.

L O N D O N:

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THE
PRINCIPLES
OF
LIBERTY:

OF
THE RIGHT OF MAN TO JUDGE
HIMSELF IN MATTERS OF
CONSCIENCE AND CONDUCT
WITHOUT PUNISHMENT



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BY ROBERT SPENCER, M.A.
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TO THE
UNIVERSITY
OF
CAMBRIDGE.

*Learned and
Respectable Gentlemen,*

YOUR Attachment to the Principles of Liberty, by which, in the intelligent World, you have acquired a Reputation equal to that of your Learning, has led me to address you in particular with a Treatise, written upon the Maxims of the Protestant Reformation.

DEDICATION.

IF I have represented these Maxims properly, as standing in the Right of private Judgment, or have treated them in a Manner agreeable to your Sentiments, the Interest of Liberty may be much avail'd by the Favour of your Approbation, in regard you have in your Power the important Education of so many as yet unprejudiced and noble Minds.

IT hath seemed to me, that the leading Principles of the Reformation have not hitherto been universally understood, and at least for a Century past have stood in need of a Recognition. Hence Popery, ever watchful

DEDICATION.

watchful of Opportunities has begun to awake its usual Arts, and is taking formidable Steps towards returning into the Kingdom.

THERE still subsists more Popery amongst us, if not in the gross Parts of it, yet in a Supineness and Negligence of the Laity to think for themselves, than many readily apprehend. Perhaps the present Generation possesses rather a Zeal for Liberty, than an Idea of making the proper Use of it.

IF I have treated the Ecclesiastic Spirit of Rome, and which appears in a Measure amongst Protestants of former Ages,

DEDICATION.

Ages, with some Asperity, it ought not to affect Divines of the present Time, whether Prelates or inferior Clergy; who are known for the most part, Persons of exemplary Moderation and Humanity, and who acquiesce freely in the Act of Toleration. No body entertains a more honourable Regard for every worthy Minister; the same which hath render'd me,

GENTLEMEN,

Your most Devoted,

and most Obedient Servant,

R. S.



T H E
Principles of LIBERTY.

A RESPECT for the general Rights of Mankind, and for the Protestant Interest in particular, hath induced me to attempt a Dissertation, in order to *defend, explain, and illustrate* the Article of LIBERTY; an Article of the greatest Importance: So fine a Flower in the Garden of human Society requires to have the most strict and constant Guard kept about it, to prevent its being oppressed, obstructed, or abused as to its Application.

In relation to that *Freethinking*, which hath raised such an Outcry with many, I would remark, in order to clear my Way, that taken in the abused Sense, it is not the Object I am concerned with; nor would I
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in any wise justify it; yet in Justice to the original, and simple Idea of the Word, it must be acknowledged that a just and impartial Exertion of the Mind is not at all criminal, but a truly useful, and commendable Act. No Man ever commenced either Atheist or Deist by thinking freely, quite the contrary, it prevents Atheism. Many perhaps have derived such Sentiments by acting too freely in Life. Persons Vices mixing with their Thoughts, blind the Judgment, and lead them to take Cover under the Shadow of Infidelity from some uneasy Apprehensions touching their future Condition. It is Vice which makes Infidels, and a want of Thinking. Neither does it follow from the Miscarriage of some Individuals made unhappy by a Smattering of Philosophy blended with their Vices, that the rest of Mankind must immediately be affrighted, and lock up all their Faculties, to prevent the Abuse of them.

There is another, and far more prevailing Evil in the present Generation, which consists in an absolute Indolence either about Philosophy or Religion; that is, a not thinking at all. An Evil which requires to be more directly struck at than the other, as
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drawing after it an hurtful Consequence, not to a few only, but to the whole Community or Nation; as from hence flow chiefly those Robberies, Outrages, Murders, that Decay of Religion, and Corruption of Manners; which trouble the present Times, and cast so gloomy an Aspect upon those which are to come.

The Right of Mankind to enjoy Liberty, both *external* and *internal*, hath its Foundation in Nature. The CREATOR having endowed them with reasonable and intelligent Faculties, it emplys and supposes them intended in general to be their own Masters, and their own Guides; not as a Matter of Favour or Indulgence at the hand of others, but as Matter of Claim inherent in the Species by the Gift of him who made them. They come into the World without the least Difference or Disparity. No man is born with a Mark of Bondage upon his Person, nor bears any one in his Face the Features of Sovereignty. This Equality of Birth contains in it such a natural Independence, that if any Change of Superiority or Inferiority ensues or appears afterwards, it cannot arise justly and lawfully, except by mutual Consent and Agreement.

Again, If Governments hence drew their Original, it cannot be supposed that the Parties agreeing to be governed, whether by a single Person, or many, intended to such Prince or Presidents any particular personal Gratification ; what they meant was Convenience and Advantage to the Body in general : Not but Governors who rule well, and support Liberty and Property, are worthy both of proper Revenues, and of high Respect from the People, as the just Recompence of an Office, so full of Fatigue and Application. Neither can it be, that Communities thus formed subjected themselves to an arbitrary Dominion. Arbitrary and lawless Power at the hands of one another, during their Anarchy, was the very Evil they fled for Refuge from, under a well adjusted Constitution. When Governments become despotic, they not only break the Compact ; but they defeat all the Ends, for which they received their Existence.

Every wise Man esteems Liberty his best Possession ; it crowns all the rest. He looks upon it as his Birth-right, nor does he forget, at least ought not, that 'tis also the Birth-right of every Man in the World :
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He knows it, because he feels it, the chief Ingredient of his Happiness ; without it Life is scarcely desirable, Enjoyments lose half their Value. 'Tis a Circumstance of the same Signification and Importance to the *moral* World, which Air is to the *material*, giving Spirit, Motion, and Vigor to the whole System comprehended in it. In proportion as Men possess this Circumstance, this Air pure and free, or dense and obstructed, their Communities are more or less agreeable. Some Communities make shift indeed with a small Portion of it ; but it is because either they know no better, or have not an Opportunity of acquiring more. In this case Nature droops and languishes, Arts and Sciences sink into Oblivion, the Culture of the Earth is neglected, and whole Regions formerly excellent cease from their Fertility. 'Tis possible also that the Inhabitants of some Countries may, by the force of a fine Climate, and natural Genius, put on a Semblance of Gaiety, and appear chearful, yet they can never be properly or thoroughly so ; it is only a driving away Sorrow. Splendor, Pomp, and Gaiety attended with continual Fear and Precariousness by means of an absolute Government, are never so considerable to the Wearers, as

to those who behold them, or hear of them. The Mountains of HELVETIA are preferable to such a Situation. In Countries where Liberty is the GRAND MONARQUE, not only the Nobles and the Gentry smile, but every Peasant, every Day-Labourer is happy; such a one remembering himself a free Man, instantly starts up into a sort of Greatness, he vaunts himself, he rejoices though in Rags, and sings in the Cottage. The Things which hinder and depress moral Liberty in the World are Fear, Superstition, and Indolence in one part of Mankind, Ambition, and Self-Interest in another: Perhaps there lyes an equal Crime in them both; it would afford a Disputation who are most to be blamed, the *ambitious*, or the *indolent*.

Human Liberty may be considered in two Branches. It is *personal* and *mental*. Under a just Government or Constitution of Things, every Man hath a Right to use his Person, Properties, and Possessions in such sort, as shall suit his own Pleasure and Convenience; that is to say, provided his Action, or Disposal of Matters is not attended with Injustice or Injury to others. His own Reason will inform him, if he consults it, that
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he has no Right to extend his Liberty to any such Degree. He must consider that others have Rights equally with himself, and one must be held in Consistency and Connection with the other. The Law of natural Equity will easily adjust such Cases. Liberty of the Mind stands in exerting itself to understand and judge touching any cognizable Object, and especially such Things, which are necessary to be known and believed, with regard to revealed Religion, and a future eternal State. A prudent Man cannot avoid judging for his own Conscience; it requires, it demands it of him. Others, not knowing the Situation of his Conscience, and in what Light Things appear to it, cannot judge for him if he would, or though they should desire so to do. A Church's Faith, or a Party's Faith, though a good one, can save no Man; it must be his own Faith either that can save him, or truly satisfy his Conscience. There is no having a Trustee or a Proxy in this Matter: 'Tis true he may lawfully, and perhaps advantageously, make use of Guides or Assistants to help him; no Reason lyes against that, provided he be careful to examine and understand the several Objects they hold forth to him, and not acquiesce in their
 Assertions

Assertions or Authority only, as thus ; A
 Number of Persons are taking the Survey of
 some *great City*, and possibly are commis-
 sioned so to do, from an Eminence in or
 near its Suburbs ; as a Traveller I join my-
 self to them. See, Friend, say they, point-
 ing also with the Hand, how conspicuous
 there the *Tower* ; with the *Navigation* up-
 on the River near it, which imports such
 continual Opulence into the Bosom of the
 City. Behold at a small Distance to the left
 a beautiful *Column*, erected on a memorable
 Occasion ; and yonder that majestic *Dome*
 rising in the midst of the Metropolis ; and
 a Variety of elegant Fabrics in several Parts,
 (with their respective Denominations) for
 religious Use. Observe, on the left of the
Dome, a *Ridge* or Range of Buildings
 leading you far away to the West ; the
 whole terminated with a venerable and illu-
 strious *Structure of Antiquity*. Now this
 may be a real Prospect, and the Objects,
 the Surveyors spake of, sufficiently known
 to Persons conversant and acquainted in the
 Place. But my Friends must excuse me, if,
 as a Stranger, I cannot so readily perceive
 and take them in, as they can run them
 over. Leisure is requisite for me to distin-
 guish ; for I don't find, that I can see by
 another's

another's Eye, or understand by another's Intellects. I suppose he, who sees not for himself, does not see at all. Such Intuition and Self-Consciousness are necessary for the Discernment of Truth, at the Hands of Guides the most honest and upright.

Again. Under a Notion of Persons qualified to instruct one, I may happen to fall into the Hands of Men, who only *pretend* to Sights, who have seen nothing themselves, neither have any thing to shew; but would make a Property of me for their Profit, or their Ambition. In a View so very possible, it must certainly concern me to use the best Precaution I am able, to avoid being imposed upon; otherwise I shall give away my Time, and perhaps my Substance also, for Deception is oftentimes much more expensive than Truth, for nothing, or rather what is worse than nothing, after the Example of the *Dutch* Peasants, who, as ERASMUS relates the Matter, were made to believe by two or three Jesters, that they saw in the Sky at Noon-day, the Impostors having previously affirmed that themselves saw it, A RED DRAGON: Whilst the Monster had no Existence, except in the Affelevation of the Artists, and the Peasants deluded Imaginations.

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It is, no doubt, a great Foible of Mankind, and especially observable among the lower Ranks, that they have a strong Propensity to be led, and will make a Surrender even of their Senses, rather than not come at something curious and wonderful. A certain sagacious Pope was so confident of this Foible, that when he was asked by a Favourite, how he could expect that the Doctrine of Transubstantiation would be received in a particular Country, he reply'd, I know them, the Inhabitants of that Country scorn to believe any thing beneath a Contradiction; and the Effect of the Embassy did too much justify his Observation. Another thing which renders the Commonalty so prone to believe implicitly, and decline judging for themselves is, they suspect too much their own Capacity; and having at the same time an high Opinion, or rather Veneration of the Learning they suppose all Divines possessed of, they make no Difficulty of submitting their Understanding to them, being generally persuaded, that by means of their Education they are always right in the Pulpit, howsoever they may err out of it. Thus they over-rate that splendid Gift, and make an Idol of it, as the Children of *Israel* erected

erected their golden Image in the Wilderness, and proclaimed before it, *these are thy Gods, O ISRAEL, which brought thee up out of the Land of EGYPT.*

Protestants are mistaken, if they reckon human Erudition the chief Article which brought us up out of the Egypt of Popery; for the Catholics had as much of that, as the reforming Party, except that they wanted the Truth with it. No doubt this Article had its Share on the Occasion, and continues a valuable Advantage towards preserving and supporting the Truth, but one cannot say it makes a Man infallible. The things which, under Providence, produced the happy Event, were good Sense, a Spirit of Liberty (the same which now works so successfully in a neighbouring Nation) with a just Resolution of restoring to Mankind their Right of *private Judgment*, and to the Sacred Scriptures their Authority of being the sole Rule both of *Faith* and *Manners*.

These two Points, the Right of private Judgment, and the Scripture's sole Authority over the Conscience, were the Pillars of the Reformation; and have the most authentic Foundation in the infallible World. The

Author of Christianity hath said, "search the Scriptures." The Precept was given both to the Jews, and his own Disciples, and in them, no doubt to all succeeding Christians, to the end by Means of the several foregoing Prophecies, they might be satisfied concerning him, as the real Messiah or Saviour, who was to appear upon the Earth. The Apostles speak the same Language, "All Scripture is given by Inspiration, and is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction and Instruction." To whom think we are the Scriptures profitable? Surely not to Divines or the Clergy only, and to be withheld from other Persons; they are profitable to Christians in general, who stand in need of being influenced and instructed by them, so as to bring forth that Virtue and Piety in Life, which may become and adorn their Profession. Another passage says, "prove all Things, and" or then, "hold fast that which is good." These Words are directed not to the Clergy at all, but to the People only; and, "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the Faith." This passage hath also a manifest Reference to the People only, the Christian Church or Commonalty of Believers in THESSALONICA and CORINTH. The Acts of the Apostles present a passage very remarkable, where

the People of BEREÄ are expressly commended, as more *noble*, that is, manly and ingenious than they of THESSALONICA, in that “ they searched the Scriptures daily, whether “ those Things were so,” even the Things asserted and affirmed by the Apostles themselves.

As the Commonalty of Christians are thus exhorted to be conversant in the Scriptures, and are commended for it; it is reasonable to suppose, notwithstanding the Insinuations of some, and their own Fears to the contrary, that they have an Ability or Capacity of understanding them; that is to say, in such Points which are *plain*, and truly *necessary* to Salvation; and what the Learned acquire more is of small Moment. If Christians in general have a Right to examine, and judge for themselves, may we not ask, how it came to pass at the Reformation, that the Compilers of the English *Liturgy* drew up the several Creeds, Prayers, and Offices of it, in so determinate and invariable a Form, as manifestly precludes all Examination or Proving about it; except a Person, through happening not to approve every Particular of it, is disposed to subject himself to Excommunication, and other severe

Penalties? May we not ask, where was then the Right of private Judgment, or that sole Authority and Sufficiency of the Scriptures, they had formerly contended for? Unless the Compilers meant, that they were first to extract from the Scriptures what they should judge a sound Faith, or a laudable Morality, and then the Community should accept it at their Hands, as relying wholly and absolutely on their Judgment in the Matter. But what is this other than Popery, disguised in a new Dress? a borrowing the Arbitrariness of *Rome* without directly or openly avowing it? Inconsistency of this kind all foreign Protestant Churches have carefully avoided,

Very possibly our Compilers were honest Men, and had a good Intention in that Uniformity, the Point they laboured at, but in the manner they aimed at it, they certainly used a Popish Claim, and the imposing it by Law, or Coercion, was a Stretch of Power. This shews the Fallibility of Mankind, and that secret Pride of Dictature, the Minds of good Men are capable of, and perhaps without their own perceiving it. Moreover, this Determining for Mankind what they must believe, and prescribing every
Thought,

Thought, and every Word of Worship (by the way an extraordinary Undertaking) hath been followed by a bad Effect, it hath proved a great *Detriment* to that Faith and Religion the Compilers had in View, and expected to promote by it; as thus, Persons receiving the Composition *implicitly*, under a Persuasion of its Justness and Propriety, use it also *implicitly*, so that it becomes too often a Form merely. Through want of examining, and understanding distinctly the Particulars, the Mind is left without Ideas, and continues without Ideas, not having taken proper Pains to be possessed of them. When this is the Case, for I do not suppose it the Case of all, a Person hath not such a Perception of the Matter in a Creed or a Prayer, as should enable him to receive by the one a real Faith, or offer in the other a reasonable Service. The Words will be uttered with little or no *Meaning* in them. A certain Office in the Liturgy declares, that when a Youth can *repeat* the Apostles Creed, the Lord's-Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, he is qualified to be confirmed by the Bishop. Surely such Confirmation is somewhat premature.

Experience

Experience shews, that religious and moral Rudiments do not prove substantial and durable, by being put into the Mouth merely. They ask to be first received into the Understanding, and to be approved there, and consented to there, and from thence to be conveyed into the Heart, and fixed in the Heart, in order to their future Appearance, and Application in Life. Otherwise they are soon erased, and blotted out. The Principles of Morality and Virtue may be compared to Seeds of Flowers, or perhaps of Wheat or Barley; if Grains of Wheat, howsoever excellent in their Kind, are dropt casually upon the Ground, and left on the Surface, 'tis well known they take no Root, nor do they yield any Harvest; rather the Fowls of the Air, who wait such Opportunities, descend and gather them up; but if the Husbandman ploughs the Earth, and casts his Wheat or Barley into the Furrows, they spring up, they yield abundantly, and he receives an ample Recompence of his Labour. So is it with young Minds, when the Ground of the Heart by proper Exercise is duly prepared, and the Seeds of Virtue are conveyed into it, such a Man advances into the World with a suitable Furniture

niture and Provision, both for his own Service, and that of the Public. On the other hand, if the Elements of Education have been left carelessly on the Surface, either of his Understanding, or Heart, he no sooner enters the World, but he meets Variety of Allurements, Temptations, Snares; these prove too strong for him, he yields, he becomes abandoned as others had been before him; his Seeds are of no use, the Cormorants have gathered them up, and they are seen no more. Of such Importance is Protestant Liberty, with a serious and early Use of it, for preventing Immorality and Vice, and for producing *real* Religion, and *substantial* Principles in the World. Other Measures, that is, external Measures may be tryed, and perhaps will avail somewhat, but nothing can reclaim Mankind *effectually*, except what comes out of every Man's own Heart.

It is a Truth, that *Ecclesiastical* Persons have frequently affected more Power than belonged to them, or was ever claimed by the Apostles; not that it ever profited the Church, but hath manifestly stumbled Mankind. What shall we say to that peremptory Language of the *Athanasian* Creed? Which

is thus introduced, *Whoſoever* will be ſaved; before all Things, it is neceſſary that he hold the Catholic Faith. Which Faith except every Man do keep whole and undeſiled; WITHOUT DOUBT HE SHALL PERISH EVERLASTINGLY. If by the term Catholic Faith the Compilers mean the general Tradition of the Romiſh Church, it is an uncertain and fallacious Expreſſion; and by enforcing the Belief of it under the Penalty of periſhing everlaſtingly, they have put on the Authority of ROME to the uttermoſt. But who hath told them ſuch ſhall ſo periſh? Or what Ground does the Denunciation ſtand upon? 'Tis true, had they affixed ſuch a Preface or Introduction to the Scriptures, it might have been juſt, and Chriſtians would not object to it. But to enforce with ſo ſolemn a Menace the Work or Composition of one or more fallible Men, is another Matter. In this Caſe, Perſons are ſubjected to Deſtruction, not for rejecting the Scriptures, or for not believing in JESUS CHRIST, but for not believing in *Them*. Poſſibly the Body of the Creed may be right; nor do I ſuppoſe that the Compilers acted from any other Motive than their great Regard for what they reckoned Orthodoxy. But ſurely it was a Zeal not according to right Knowledge.

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This flaming Zeal and rash Severity brings to Mind that Mistake of the Disciples JAMES and JOHN. When the Inhabitants of a *Samaritan* Village refused their Master some transient Accommodations amongst them, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command Fire to come down from Heaven, and consume them? But how answered the dispassionate Saviour? He rebuked them, and said, "ye know not what Manner of Spirit ye are of." You do not seem to discern what an improper and unbecoming Turn of Mind you are cherishing; the Son of Man is not come to destroy Mens Lives, but to save them. Some Apology may be made for these Zealots. At that time they were *young* Disciples, not sufficiently acquainted, either with the Mind of their Master, or with the Genius and Spirit of the Gospel. But that Persons of Experience, and *Fathers* in Christianity, should discover the like Disposition, is not so easy to be accounted for.

One would think by their absolute proceedings some of the Reformers were troubled with a short Memory. They blamed formerly the Arbitrariness of ROME, and argued in common with other Protestants,

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against subjection to any such Authority. But when the successor of St. PETER was thrown out of the Saddle, it seems others were standing ready to get in. Though singly in themselves they were good Protestants, being met in an Assembly they keep the Old-Style, and what was aforesaid human Power, and vain Inventions, was now Uniformity, and Peace, and Order, and Decency. So apt are Men to change their Opinion, when the glittering Object of Power presents itself in their Reach. Thus ROME and CONSTANTINOPLE contended antiently about the title of *Oecumenical* or *Universal* Bishop, which in truth belonged to neither. ROME protested against CONSTANTINOPLE, when the Grecian Patriarch solicited the Supremacy, and declared that whosoever should accept that Title would be the Forerunner of *Antichrist*; yet after a Season she accepted it herself, at the Hand of PHOCAS the Emperor.

Possibly when the English Reformers settled the Church under positive Determinations, they were persuaded better Things of themselves, and happier Consequences from their Appointments, than what they had discerned in the Pope, or known to have been

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the Effect of his Sanctions. And indeed the gross Parts of Popery were discharged by them. Possibly also they were persuaded, that the Points determined and settled by them, were all conformable to the Scripture. Yet who, or what Party, touching their own Opinion, hath not affirmed the same, and been equally so persuaded? I apprehend, even supposing all the Points contained in an Establishment, strictly and truly founded in Scripture, and are Truth, yet if the Community in general are not properly encouraged, or peradventure neglect, to be satisfied of it, it is not Scripture or Truth to them; with regard to them it is still an implicit and absolute Affair.

The Office of Clergymen, and the Beauty of the Office properly exercised, consists in their being Teachers to Mankind, not any thing further, and that with all Gentleness and Goodness; as clearly appears by the Conduct, and Writings of that truly venerable and honest *Ecclesiastic* the Apostle PAUL, Let us hear what he says, "Knowing says he, "the Terrors of the Lord, we persuade Men. "As Ambassadors of GOD, we beseech, we "pray you." Again, "commending ourselves "to every Man's Conscience." Or, we come

to high and low, rich, and poor, forcing no Man's Conscience, but with Simplicity and Sincerity of Behaviour, presenting proper Arguments to their own Reason, and Understandings. Again, "not that we have Dominion over your Faith, but are helpers of your Joy." These Words manifest the whole of the Matter, they imply, that Ministers are not, as Lords, to command and enjoin men what they should believe, rather should refer the Articles or Propositions of Faith to their own Consciences, according to what Light and Evidence they may appear with to them. Instead of Lords to command, they are Assistants to help Men, as Occasions may offer or require, in their Endeavours after the Knowledge of those Things, which are alone capable of affording them that spiritual Joy, which flows from the Gospel. Thus the Scripture describes the ministerial Function, and an honourable one too, if faithfully executed. If Ecclesiastics usurp any thing further, it is what they have no Commission or Warrant for, whatsoever Warrant they may have made out for themselves, or others may have been weak enough to give them. The excellent Person, whose Conduct I am quoting has the Goodness also to remind the
Christian

Christian Churches of their Liberty, and Privileges, lest they should *overlook*, or *neglect* them. "Ye are called, says he, to "Liberty," appointed, intitled to it, by Charter of the Gospel. And, "be not the Servants of Men." He avouches too his own Liberty, "I am free, says he, from all Men." By these, and the like passages, in the Epistles of PAUL, and other Acts of the first Apostles, arises a clear Idea, touching the Liberty of the Christian Church in general, and the Usage or Manner of Churches in particular. We do not read in them of any national Church, but Churches in the plural Number; the Churches of JUDEA, the Churches of GALATIA, the seven Churches of ASIA, and the Church in some particular City, or House. And according to the apostolic or primitive Sketch, every Congregation, with its Minister, and proper Officers is a Church, free and independent of all other; except that Courtesy and Discretion may lead them occasionally to mutual Deliberation and Conference. And Congregations through the World, taken collectively, are *the* Church, so far as it is visible. In each Congregation the Minister is *free* from the People, and the People are *free* from the Minister, in such a sense, that

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the Pastor hath a Right to preach according to his own Judgment and Discretion, and they have a Right to accept or disapprove what he delivers, through comparing it with the infallible Word. Every Member of such Congregation is *free* from another Member, and the meanest Man or Woman *free* and *independant*, as the greatest. Not that the Christian Liberty authorizes any Person to contend or disagree, either with the Minister or Members, through a Spirit of Levity and Wantonness. Such a Spirit would be highly blaineable, and worthy the severest Censure. A wise and good Man would chuse to be agreeable to the utmost, if possible, from a Principle of Charity and Peace. But Freedom and Independance must be maintained, if Persons would be *consistent* Protestants. Every thing else tends to Ignorance and Folly.

Mere Power and human Authority cannot be admitted, either properly or safely, into a scriptural Church. There is no giving way to a *little* Popery; if we yield to a Part, the Body will soon follow. That Tyranny our Ancestors refused to bear, when they shook off the *Roman* Yoak, is like a Body of Water confined for a Time, and bounded
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in a Dam. If the Banks are not well watched, and the Water finds a Vent, be the Vent ever so small, it soon widens the Breach ; it loses no Time, before the Keepers are aware, the Breach is past Recovery, the Torrent rushes away and steers whatever Course it pleases. Neither should Protestants suppose, that Tyranny either civil or spiritual is the Growth only of ROME, as an Effect of the *Italian* Air, or of the Air of SPAIN and PORTUGAL ; a Desire of Power and Supremacy is a Passion incident to Mankind. *Antichrist* may reside chiefly upon the seven Hills, as delighting particularly in that Region, but he is born in *every* Country, and in *every* Man, and sits upon *every* Heart, till right Reason, or if that will not do, the Force of Arms drives him out. Even the Laiety who complain of Ecclesiastics, was their situation changed into that of the Clergy, would find themselves under strong Temptation to the same Ascendancy, and to the same Acquisitions. There is an Evil, worthy to be lamented, which sometimes appears amongst Protestants, that many are solicitous of Liberty for themselves, and for their Party, without an equal Care in behalf of others. Perhaps do persecute in their turn, such who differ from them,

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in that very Spirit they formerly suffered by, at the Hands of their Oppressors. We find no small Relapse and Oversight of this kind, in the Reign of HENRY the VIIIth; when the Reformation, though begun, was yet in a mixt and imperfect State. The Authors and Setters forth of Edicts in those Times, particularly HENRY himself, seem constantly to have forgot what was the Authority they had demolished, and the Grievance they were then to remove. An Evil is not changed by a Change of Hands; as the Evil had been *oppressive Power*, it was with very ill Grace they adopted it into their own Practice. Persecution and Pain are the same Injuries, whether they come from the Hand of an Enemy, or of a Friend; the latter rather adds a Smart to the Suffering, than alleviates the Case. It was not sufficient for them, who succeeded in Power, to say, what we enact, what we enjoin the Belief of, is not of ROME, but by a scriptural and just Authority. Others commanded Things false and erroneous, we no other than the Truth. Such Allegations are no better than Parade and Grimace (what Oppressors have not alledged the same?) if Persons must be put to Death, as some were in that Reign, for Difference of Opinion. Yet it
 must

must be acknowledged, that in the midst of these Oversights, many excellent Things were brought to pass, and which laid the Foundation of the whole ensuing Reformation ; probably the Parliament also in those Days judged it more adviseable to bear with the King's Errors, and a few unprotestant Proceedings, than risk the grand Point, they afterwards so happily accomplished. The milder Sentiments of EDWARD's Government, which followed, like a Calm after a Tempest, makes amends for the preceding Hurry and Disorder. The Sentiments of EDWARD's Reign on the Subject of Religion are, for the most part, Protestant and just. So are those generally, which run through the Reign of Queen ELIZABETH ; a Princess who stood the Shock of ROME, SPAIN and FRANCE, in Defence of the Reformed Interest, both at home and abroad. The Efforts of the Catholic Potentates to re-establish a bad Cause, were continually defeated by her Superiority, as well in Councils as in Arms. She left behind her an Age of Glory, and which will distinguish the *British* Annals to the latest Generations. Under several Princes, who succeeded ELIZABETH, the Interest of Liberty was, by means of false Maxims in their Government,

not a little impaired and oppressed. Many Incroachments were made upon it, and more attempted. A Struggle was carried on with various Success, between Liberty and arbitrary Power, till we arrive at the *Æra* of *GEORGE* the First. By the Accession of that Prince to the Throne, the Principles of the old Leaven received a Check, and Liberty revived. It was preserved at a critical Season, and by the King's steady and honourable Administration receiving fresh Vigour, and growing in the Esteem of all rational Persons, has happily flourished to the present Times. Even the Enemies of the *HOUSE OF HANOVER* (if it hath any) must acknowledge, that its Princes have maintained this Article in an unexceptionable Manner. They have made it a Point of Honour; and no doubt will continue at all Events, a Maxim of such Merit in its self, and which reflects so bright a Lustre, and Dignity upon the Crown.

The King of *GREAT-BRITAIN* bears a peculiar Title; *Defender of the Faith*. How do we understand this Title? Surely, not that it means him Defender of the Romish Faith; a more just Sense must be, that he takes upon to defend the Faith of the Holy Scriptures.

Scriptures. Nor does it solely mean him Defender of the Faith of the Church of *England*; that would be too narrow and partial a Signification. In the most rational and perfect Sense, it implies him Defender of that, and of all the Christian Churches, committed to his Care, throughout his Dominions; and in an humane and generous View, out of his Dominions. 'Tis true the Pontiff, who made the Compliment of this Title to King HENRY, intended it, we must suppose, in a Papal Interpretation; but our Princes are not obliged to take or wear it in that Sense, or in any short of a *Protestant Comprehension*.

In proportion as Mankind improve in their Ideas of Liberty and Reason, 'tis observable, they grow more *cool* and *moderate*, in relation to many Articles, which before they laid no small Stress upon. The divine Right of Church-Governments, whether by Bishops, Priests, and Deacons; or by Presbyters and Deacons, or in some Form different from both. The Authority and sole Validity of this or another Ordination of Ministers, their Right to exclude the rest, or at least Preference to them, in administering Things sacred. Such Distinctions

rely wholly on a *Popish* Principle, derived from that Maxim of the *Romanists*, that there is no Salvation out of their Church. If People of the Church of ENGLAND, or the Members of any particular Party conceive the same Thought, they err in that Narrowness, just as the *Romanists* do. These, and other such Disputes, which depend on contracted Ideas, always *lose Ground*, as Light and Knowledge *gain Ground* in the World. Perhaps after fruitless Debates, and much Fatigue, it will be found that the Gospel or New-Testament holds forth *no precise Model* of Ecclesiastical Government at all. It is of a different Nature from the Old-Testament. The *Jewish* Oeconomy was manifestly confined to the *Hebrew* Nation; but the *Evangelical* Dispensation being intended for the whole World, it was impossible in the nature of Things to fit with one Model such an infinite Variety of Climates, Tempers, Customs, and Educations of Men. Neither, if possible, could it have agreed with the Genius and Nature of the Gospel. The whole Government there stands in Freedom, referred to *Reason* and *Discretion*, as Incidents and the Circumstances of Things *may require*. If Providence had intended one particular Form, either for the Govern-
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ment of the Church, or Ordination of its Ministers, it would not have left it under a Difficulty of being discerned, and subject to doubtful Disputation. A mere Example or Precedent in Scriptures, though it may shew a Matter to be lawful, is no Argument of perpetual Obligation. Many Persons deal *partially* with the Word; they make some Examples Precedents, and some not, as suits a favourite Prepossession. I apprehend any Model of Church Government, or Ordination, or Mode of religious Worship, consistent with Reason, may be lawful, one equally with another, provided the Liberty of Individuals be preserved, and the Reality of Religion be found to flourish under them.

As Superstition and Bigotry decrease, Protestants look less to the Trappings of Religion, and more to the Substance, less to the Form, and more to the Power of it. They cease from preferring one Minister to another; they regard their Usefulness, and exemplary Behaviour. They find but *two Sorts* among them all. Those whom the Master of the Vineyard sends, bring their *Credentials* with them. They have an Ability to instruct, and shew a Copy of the Precept in their own Lives, and Conversation;

tion; these are *proper Guides*, and worthy of Respect and Honour. Others, who come, but are not sent, are *mere Priests*, bold and assuming Men, who having nothing substantial to communicate, only exhibit a kind of Sights in the Air, curious and imaginary Things, which amaze and deceive the Unwary; such must not wonder if they are lightly esteemed. It is a useful and prudent Exercise to aim at a knowledge of Mankind, in order to avoid being carried away by Appearance, Profession, and Pretences. Till Persons attain this Knowledge, they suffer many Disadvantages in Life, both spiritual and secular. And especially with regard to Religion, Persons must exercise their own Reason, and dare to examine received Customs and Opinions, before they rest or sit down upon any. The same Rule holds in regard to *Philosophy*, and the *Sciences*; a valuable and eminent Degree of these asks an Independence of the Mind, and flows from a *free Enquiry*.

Upon the whole, Few Persons come to be solid Christians, unless they are first true Protestants. By a modest Use of their own Reason, and proper Converse with the infallible Writings, that Faith, and Virtue becomes

comes their free Choice, which are in vain attempted by Force, or aimed at in implicit Compliances. Nothing can be *true Religion* except it be *free*. Not customary Opinions, not implicit Assent to *Ecclesiastical* Determinations, not Forms, nor Modes, nor any thing merely external; but that which is received within, that which rules the Heart, that which honours the Deity, and profits Mankind, is the Object wise Men call and esteem Religion, nothing beside being worth contending for.

The Time will come, when Light and Knowledge will fill the Earth, and Men shall see by them to knock off their Fetters. The Time will come, when Kings shall hate the WHORE, when they shall withhold that Power and Countenance, they had been accustomed to give her, and snatching out of her Hand the Cup of Inchantment, shall strip her of her defenced Places, and demolish her strong Towers, scattering towards the four Winds the very Dust of them.

Upon LIBERTY both without and within depends all the Beauty of Life. And it is pity so important a Possession should either be *abused* or *neglected*. The Abuse of Liberty
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brings Vice and Vanity, and Remorse ; modestly and properly exercised, it produces as many Advantages. Particularly, there would flow from it, and from thence *only*, that Firmness in the Christian Faith, that Revival of Virtue and Integrity, and that Amendment in the Morals of the Nation, which are so greatly desirable. *Bigotry* would wear away, *Ignorance* vanish, and *Superstition* grow ashamed to shew her Head. Religion would become rational, Society moral, the whole *British* State strong, peaceful, invincible.



F I N I S.

